

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 0869

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SUBJECT: CURRENT LATIN AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE US

REF: STATE 010605

SUMMARY: ENVIRONMENT IN BRAZIL IN WHICH US IS VIEWED INCLUDES
TRADITION OF STRONG EXECUTIVE AND ELITE DISTRUST OF THE MASS AND
ITS REPRESENTATIVES, A GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED AND SUPPORTED BY CONSERV

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ATIVE MILITARY OBSESSED WITH COMMUNIST THREAT, ENTREPRENEURIAL CLASS
WITH SIMILAR VIEW, ESTABLISHED TENDENCY TO TAKE US DEFENSE SHIELD
FOR GRANTED, AND SHARING BY MAJOR NEWSPAPERS OF THESE VIEWS OF
SOVIET INTENTIONS AND US PROTECTION RESPONSIBILITIES. AS
TENTATIVE, NOT IRREVERSIBLE QUALIFICATION, AND NOT REPLACEMENT, OF
TRADITIONAL VIEW OF US AS ECONOMICALLY AND MILITARILY POWERFUL,
POLITICALLY COHESIVE, AND INTERNATIONALLY ACTIVE AND CAPABLE, THERE
IS CURRENT IN BRAZIL OPINION THAT US HAS LOST OR
IS LOSING ITS RESOLVE AND EVEN SOME OF ITS CAPACITY AS WORLD
POWER. VIEW HAS VARIATIONS FROM SECTOR TO SECTOR
WITHIN BRAZIL, AND WATERGATE AND CIA
REVELATIONS WERE BOTH BARIOUSLY INTERPRETED AND WITH PARTICULAR
RESPECT TO THE LATTER, DIMLY UNDERSTOOD. RESPECT CONTINUES FOR US
MILITARY AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH, AS IT DOES FOR TECHNOLOGICAL, EDUC-

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ATIONAL, AND TRADE ACHIEVEMENTS AND ABILITIES, BUT SIZABLE CONSERVATIVE SECTOR ALSO SEES EXCESS OF PERMISSIVENESS AND EVEN DECADENCE. CONGRESS IS CONSIDERED PRINCIPAL ELEMENT LIMITING US CAPACITY FOR ACTION ABROAD, WITH VIET NAM EXPERIENCE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTING FACTOR AND ANGOLA PRIME CURRENT EXAMPLE. INFORMED BRAZILIANS HAVE HAD AT LEAST SOME EXPOSURE TO GROUND RULES AND MECHANICS OF US POLITICAL PROCESS, BUT FAIL TO UNDERSTAND ITS IMPLICATIONS. LONG-STANDING SUSPICIONS ABOUT PRIORITY EXECUTIVE ASSIGNS TO LA HAVE BROADENED TO GENERAL NORTH-SOUTH ARENA. BRAZIL HAS NOT ABANDONED TRADITIONAL PREFERENCE FOR DEALING WITH US BILATERALLY, BUT BELIEVES SOME MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE USEFUL IN EXERTING COLLECTIVE PRESSURE ON US. MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN ANY DECLINE IN BRAZILIAN READINESS TO COOPERATE WITH AND DEPEND ON US IS PROBABLY ITS DRIVE TOWARD MAJOR-POWER STATUS, IN WHICH IT SEEKS NOT TO REPLACE US BUT TO INCREASE ITS OWN OPTIONS AND SCOPE. THIS DRIVE FOR MORE PARTNERS AND GREATER WORLD INFLUENCE COULD WELL HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES IN FUTURE, AND INSTANCES HAVE ALREADY OCCURRED, BUT WE RETAIN SOME ADVANTAGES, INCLUDING CONTINUING RESPECT FOR US ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ENVIRONMENT IN BRAZIL IN WHICH THE US IS VIEWED INCLUDES, OR SPRINGS IN PART FROM, THE FOLLOWING SPECIAL ELEMENTS:

A. A TRADITION OF A VERY STRONG EXECUTIVE, WITH POWER HISTORICALLY WIELDED IN EFFECT BY AN ELITE DISTRUSTFUL AND FEARFUL OF THE MASS. THE REVOLUTION OF 1964 INTENSIFIED BOTH ELEMENTS, ESTABLISHING AN ALL-POWERFUL EXECUTIVE AND EXTENDING DISTRUST OF THE MASS TO CONTEMPT FOR AND FEAR OF ITS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES;

B. A GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED AND SUPPORTED BY CONSERVATIVE MILITARY WHO ARE STRONGLY--AT TIMES PARANOICALLY--ANTI-COMMUNIST AND WHO, IN THEIR GREAT MAJORITY, ARE CONVINCED THAT BRAZIL HAS BEEN AND REMAINS A PRIME TARGET OF WHAT IS CALLED, WITH INITIAL LETTERS IN UPPER CASE, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT. THE SOVIET UNION IS SEEN AS PROVIDING THE PRINCIPAL SUPPORT AND DIRECTION FOR THIS COHESIVE, INTEGRATED, CONSPIRATORIAL AND PERNICIOUS MOVEMENT, AND THE PRESS--IN BRAZIL, IN THE US, AROUND THE WORLD--AS
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HEAVILY INFILTRATED BY ITS TRAINED AND DEDICATED ACCOMPLICES;
C. AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CLASS, THE OTHER PRINCIPAL PILLAR OF THE REVOLUTION MANY OF WHOSE MEMBERS SHARE THESE VIEWS;
D. THE FACT THAT, BRAZILIANS IN GENERAL AND THE GOVERNMENTS IN PARTICULAR HAVE ALWAYS TAKEN FOR GRANTED THE US DEFENSE SHIELD;
E. OTHER OPINION FORMERS, INCLUDING MOST IMPORTANTLY SOME MAJOR NEWSPAPERS, WHICH SHARE THESE VIEWS OF SOVIET INTENTIONS AND OF US PROTECTION RESPONSIBILITIES AND WHICH

CONSIDER THAT THE US RESPONSE TO SOVIET ACTIONS (AS IN ANGOLA) SHOULD BE MET BY A VIGOROUS US RESPONSE UNHAMPERED BY "LEGALISTIC"--I.E. CONSTITUTIONAL--CONSIDERATIONS.

2. THUS THERE IS CURRENT IN BRAZIL A VIEW THAT THE US HAS LOST, OR IS LOSING, ITS RESOLVE AND EVEN SOME PART OF ITS CAPACITY AS A WORLD POWER AND PRINCIPAL SWORD AND SHIELD OF THE WEST. FACTORS IDENTIFIED AS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS DECLINE INCLUDE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND WEAKNESSES IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. BUT THE PRINCIPAL ELEMENT IS USUALLY IDENTIFIED AS AN INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE AND PARACHIAL CONGRESS WHOSE ACTIONS ARE PARTLY BASED ON THE VIEWS AND DESIRES OF A PEOPLE WEARY OF FOREIGN RESPONSIBILITIES AND EVER MORE CONCERNED WITH THINGS AT HOME. IN BROAD GENERAL TERMS, THIS VIEW IS PREVALENT ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF OPINION--FORMERS FROM RIGHT TO LEFT, THOUGH THERE ARE SHARP DIFFERENCES AS TO ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

3. THE GLOSSES ON THIS GENERAL PICTURE THAT VARY FROM SECTOR TO SECTOR WITHIN BRAZIL STAND OUT MOST SHARPLY WITH REGARD TO THE SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTS AND CONDITIONS SEEN AS FUELING THE US DECLINE. THUS, WATERGATE WAS SEEN IN CONSERVATIVE CIRCLES AS A TOTALLY UNNECESSARY AND TERRIBLY SELF-DESTRUCTIVE EXERCISE, WITH ELEMENTS OF LESE-MAJESTE, OF BENEFIT ONLY TO THE ENEMIES OF THE US AND THE WEST; IN LIBERAL CIRCLES, HOWEVER, IT WAS BROADLY HAILED AS AN INSPIRING DEMONSTRATION OF FIDELITY TO PRINCIPLE AND OF THE VIGORED RESILIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATIONS BROUGHT A SIMILAR SPLIT, BUT ONE THAT WAS BOTH NARROWER AND ALSO MORE BLURRED BY A GENERAL PERPLEXITY OVER WHAT THE FUSS WAS ABOUT. US CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC INDIGNATION OVER THE CIA REVELATIONS WAS NOT ECHOED HERE EXCEPT IN NATIONALIST-LEFT CIRCLES, AND INDEED SUCH INDIGNATION WAS ONLY DIMLY UNDERSTOOD. CIA INTERVENT-
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ION IN CHILE WAS OF COURSE RESENTED BY MANY YOUNGER BRAZILIANS, BUT PREVAILING REACTION TO THOSE EXPOSURES WAS MORE ONE OF REGRETFUL ACCEPTANCE OF FACT THAT CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS ARE INHERENT IN GREAT POWER ROLE. EXPOSURES OF CIA DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES ALSO BY AND LARGE VIEWED AS UNEXCEPTIONAL HERE BY PUBLIC THOROUGHLY CONDITIONED TO HEAVY PRESENCE OF SECURITY FORCES IN ITS OWN DAY-TO-DAY LIFE.

4. THESE LATTER-DAY GENERAL VIEWS ARE, WE BELIEVE A TENTATIVE, NOT IRREVERSIBLE QUALIFICATION, RATHER THAN A COMPLETE REPLACEMENT, OF THE MORE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE US AS ECONOMICALLY AND MILITARILY POWERFUL, POLITICALLY COHESIVE, AND INTERNATIONALLY ACTIVE AND CAPABLE. SUPPORTING OUR BELIEF ARE THE INSTANCES OF PERSISTENCE OF SPECIFIC TRADITIONAL

ATTITUDES. THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS MOST SHARPLY SPOKEN ABOUT THE "LAPSE" IN US WILL, THE "GROWING INFLUENCE OF THE LEFT," THE "DISRESPECT FOR AUTHORITY" ETC. AND THEIR HARMFUL EFFECTS ON WESTERN DEFENSE. NEVERTHELESS, IT RETAINS GREAT RESPECT FOR, AND FAITH IN, THE US MILITARY'S OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES, AND SAW VIET NAM AS A POLITICAL, NOT MILITARY, FAILURE. ACADEMIC CIRCLES CONTINUE TO SHOW GREAT ENTHUSIASM FOR US EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS AND SYSTEMS. THERE IS CONTINUING HIGH REGARD FOR US TECHNOLOGY, AND BRAZILIANS GENERALLY APPEAR TO HAVE REMAINED IMPRESSED WITH THE SIZE AND STRENGTH OF THE US ECONOMY.

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THE BUSINESS SECTOR, FOR ITS PART, STILL SEEMS MORE INTERESTED IN PRODUCT QUALITY AND GENERAL WORKING COMPETITIVENESS, WHICH THEY CONTINUE TO SEE IN US, THAN IN BROAD POLITICAL CONCERNS. AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS A PERVASIVE TENDENCY IN SIZABLE BUT RELATIVELY INARTICULATE PORTION OF BRAZILIAN SOCIETY WITH STRONG CONSERVATIVE INSTINCTS TO SEE US DIVORCE RATE, CRIME, PORNOGRAPHY, DRUGS, AND GENERAL PERMISSIVENESS AS EXPRESSIONS OF DECADENCE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO US POLITICAL MALAISE. INTERESTINGLY, THIS PURITANTICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD "PERMISSIVENESS," WHICH IS WIDELY AND STRONGLY HELD WITHIN THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY AS WELL, IS NOT CARRIED OVER INTO THE ADMINISTRATIVE FIELD, WHERE "CORRUPTION" IS MORE NEARLY EQUATED TO FINANCIAL

LAXITY THAN TO MORAL TURPITUDE. THIS CONTRIBUTED IMPORTANTLY TO THE WIDESPREAD FAILURE HERE TO UNDERSTAND WATERGATE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE US CORRECTLY.

5. AS NOTED, THE US CONGRESS IS GENERALLY SEEN AS THE PRINCIPAL ELEMENT LIMITING THE USG'S CAPACITY FOR ACTION ABROAD. CERTAINLY, THE VIET NAM EXPERIENCE IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED IMPORTANTLY TO THE PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES UNDERLYING THE CURRENT STANCE OF THE CONGRESS. IN THAT SENSE, THE OUTCOME IN VIET NAM HAS AFFECTED THE BRAZILIAN VIEW OF US ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS

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TO ACCEPT ADDITIONAL INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENTS. THE SOVIET-CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA IS A CASE IN POINT, FOR THAT INVOLVEMENT HAS DRAWN LESS ATTENTION FOR ITSELF THAN IT HAS FOR THE WAY IT POINTS UP CURRENT US INCAPACITIES. THE US REACTION TO THAT INVOLVEMENT HAS BEEN SEEN AS LIMITED, AND THEN AS EFFECTIVELY CUT OFF, THE USG RENDERED IMPOTENT IN THAT SITUATION BY ITS OWN CONGRESS. WILLINGNESS OF THE US TO STAND BY ITS BASIC VITAL AND LONGSTANDING INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS SUCH AS THE DEFENSE OF WESTERN EUROPE OR LATIN AMERICA AGAINST DIRECT SOVIET AGGRESSION, IS GENERALLY SEEN AS MORE PERMANENT AND DURABLE AND NOT SO EASILY SHAKEN BY SHORT-TERM POLITICAL VAGARIES, ALTHOUGH UNEASY DOUBTS ARE SOMETIMES EXPRESSED.

6. THE BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT, AND INFORMED BRAZILIANS IN GENERAL, HAVE HAD AT LEAST SOME EXPOSURE TO THE GROUND RULES AND MECHANICS OF THE US POLITICAL PROCESS, AND THEY ARE AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF, FOR EXAMPLE, A CONGRESSIONAL ROLE IN THE US NATIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, PRESSURE GROUPS, THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY OF THE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT AND OF CHECKS AND BALANCES, AND OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. WHAT THEY OFTEN FAIL, AND OFTEN FAIL COMPLETELY, TO GRASP IS THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF THESE ELEMENTS FOR A TRULY LIBERAL PLURALISTIC SOCIETY. INCLINED TO JUDGE THE US POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, THESE BRAZILIANS ARE DISPOSED TO INTERPRET IT AS A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS, OR AT LEAST RIGHTFULLY SHOULD BE, ONE IN WHICH THE WILL OF THE EXECUTIVE MUST ULTIMATELY PREVAIL ON VITAL MATTERS. (THUS WHEN SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE US EXECUTIVE BRANCH COMPLAIN TO BRAZILIAN INTERLOCUTORS ABOUT CONGRESS, THE LATTER TEND TO LEAP DELIGHTEDLY TO TOTALLY ERRONEOUS CONCLUSIONS.) SIMILARLY, THERE IS A TENDENCY TO SEE CONGRESSIONAL ASSERTIVENESS AND THE AGGRESSIVE EXPOSES OF THE PRESS IN SUCH CASES AS WATERGATE AND THE CIA AS BOTH DESTRUCTIVE AND UNDISCIPLINED BEHAVIOR, FOMENTED BY COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN THE PRESS AND ENCOURAGED BY THE WEAKNESS OF WHAT SHOULD BE "THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY", THE EXECUTIVE. FEW BRAZILIANS, MOREOVER, WE BELIEVE EVEN IN THE GOVERNMENT,

HAVE A VERY ACCURATE APPRECIATION OF THE REALITIES OF THE
INTER-ACTION OF THE PLAYERS, A LACK WHICH INTER ALIA LEADS
THEM TO EXAGGERATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF US PRESS STORIES

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ABOUT SHIFTS IN POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG THOSE PLAYERS.

7. THE PICTURE OF THE US CONGRESS AS AN OBSTURCTION OR
(IN THE CASE OF THE RETALIATORY AMENDMENTS) THREAT TO LATIN
AMERICAN INTERESTS AND ASPIRATIONS IS, OF COURSE, NOT
NEW NOR IS THE SUSPICION THAT THE EXECUTIVE ASSIGNS A LOW
PRIORITY TO THE REGION AND COULD IN FACT DO MORE TO
OVERCOME CONGRESSIONAL OBSTACLES. AS THE NORTH-SOUTH
CONFLICT HAS SHARPENED IN MORE RECENT YEARS, THAT FEELING HAS
BROADENED TO INCLUDE THE LDC'S IN GENERAL AND HAS BEEN
JOINED BY THE SUSPICION THAT THE US IS NOT REALLY PREPARED FOR
A REDISTRIBUTION OF INTERNATIONAL POWER AND INFLUENCE.
BASICALLY, THE PERCEPTION IS THAT THE US AS AN INDUSTRIAL
NATION PAR EXCELLENCE HAS MUCH THAT BRAZIL NEEDS FOR RAPID
DEVELOPMENT, BUT THAT THE US WILL YIELD THESE THINGS
RELUCTANTLY AND ONLY WITH POWERFUL POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE
INCENTIVES. THIS IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT BRAZILIANS
SEE OTHER ADVANCED COUNTRIES AS MORE ALTRUISTIC.

8. THESE CONSIDERATIONS MUST LOGICALLY BE HELD TO REPRESENT
A FACTOR IN BRAZIL'S READINESS TO COOPERATE WITH AND
DEPEND ON THE US, BUT THERE ARE OTHER ELEMENTS, PROBABLY
MORE FUNDAMENTAL, IMPELLING BRAZIL TO SEEK TO REDUCE THAT
READINESS. AS PART OF ITS DRIVE TOWARD MAJOR-POWER STATUS,
BRAZIL, ALERT TO WHAT IT SEES AS EMERGENCE OF NEW POWER
FACTORS IN THE WORLD ORDER, IS DETERMINED NOT TO BE TIED TO
US APRON STRINGS--OR PURSE STRINGS (ALTHOUGH IT IS PARADOXICALLY
RETAINING ITS BASIC SECURITY DEPENDENCE). IT IS SEEKING TO ELIMINATE
FROM THE RELATIONSHIP ANY CONNOTATION OF DEPENDENCY THROUGH
INCREASING ITS OPTIONS AND BROADENING ITS FIELD OF ACTION AND POTENTIAL

INFLUENCE; AND ITS PURSUIT OF TIGHTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DC'S
IS BEST UNDERSTOOD IN THAT LIGHT. SIMILARLY, THE SHIFT
IN BRAZIL'S VOTING PATTERNS IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS QUITE
CLEARLY REFLECTS ITS 80 PERCENT DEPENDENCE ON PETROLEUM
IMPORTS AND, MORE BROADLY, ITS SEARCH FOR INCREASED INFLUENCE
IN A WORLD MOSTLY COMPOSED OF LDC'S. FINALLY, BRAZIL HAS
BY NO MEANS ABANDONED ITS LONG-STANDING PREFERENCE FOR
DEALING WITH THE US ON A BILATERAL BASIS. IT HAS, HOWEVER,
ADDED TO ITS SENSE OF SOLIDARITY WITH ITS LATIN NEIGHBORS
AND ITS FELLOW LDC'S THE IDEA THAT AN ORGANIZATION LIKE

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SELA (MORE THAN THE OAS) CAN BE USEFUL IN BRINGING COLLECTIVE
PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE US ON MATTERS OF DIRECT INTEREST
TO BRAZIL.

9. BRAZIL'S DRIVE FOR MORE PARTNERS AND GREATER WORLD
INFLUENCE COULD WELL HAVE ADVERSE FUTURE CONSEQUENCES IN THE
TRADE, ACCESS TO RAW MATERIALS, TECHNICAL COOPERATION, AND
POLITICAL FIELDS; AND SOME INSTANCES, TOO WELL KNOWN TO
NEED RECALLING HERE, HAVE ALREADY OCCURRED. WE ARE NOT,
HOWEVER, WITHOUT OUR ADVANTAGES: AS NOTED ABOVE, RESPECT
FOR PRODUCT QUALITY, TECHNOLOGY, AND ECONOMIC AND OTHER
ACHIEVEMENTS REMAIN HIGH; AND THERE ARE SIGNS THAT
IMPORTANT OPINIONS WITHIN THE GOB HOLD THAT BRAZIL'S LOT
IS BEST CAST WITH THE RICH AND POWERFUL FEW, RATHER THAN
WITH THE POOR AND WEAK MAJORITY.
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